

DAVID LIFTON

David Lifton, a native of New York City, graduated in 1962 from Cornell University's School of Engineering Physics. Within weeks of graduation he had accepted a job in the Space and Information Systems Division of North American Aviation, the principal contractor for the Apollo space program, in Downey, California. He also enrolled in a graduate program at UCLA with the goal of a Ph.D. in either physics or electrical engineering.

By his own account he was apolitical, although he was interested in anything that "smacked of intrigue or mystery." In 1959, when Castro assumed power in Cuba, he had been vacationing in Florida and made a trip to Havana during the last days of Batista's rule. He also toured Europe during the summer of 1961 and went to Berlin shortly after the Berlin Wall was constructed.

On November 21, 1963, Lifton worked the night shift in the computer center at North American. He heard about the assassination of John F. Kennedy on the radio but made a deliberate effort to avoid watching the television coverage, because of "an aversion for public displays of grief." The cocoon of his world was secure.

His attitude toward the assassination began to change in September 1964. While visiting his parents in New York City, he heard that Mark Lane, one of the vocal advocates of a conspiracy theory, was giving a lecture. Lifton decided to attend for "sheer entertainment value, in much the way I might attend a lecture given by someone who argues the world is flat."

He came away impressed with the amount of contradictory information that had been released about President Kennedy's wounds. The Warren Commission issued its official report on the assassination shortly thereafter, and he was sufficiently interested to follow the reaction.

After his return to Los Angeles, Lifton attended a second Lane lecture, where he met a number of people who were students of the assassination, serious enough students to have purchased the entire 26 volumes of the Report.

The beginning of Lifton's intense personal involvement in the case came in March 1965, when he read a friend's copy of the Report in which he saw the frames of the Zapruder film that showed President Kennedy's head moving backward after the fatal shot. He could not understand how this clear evidence, which "flew in the face of physics," could have been ignored by the Commission.

Then he happened to see a newspaper photograph of the grassy knoll and what seemed to be a figure hunched behind the wall. He became immersed in a study of this photograph, enlarging it and analyzing it, until he was convinced he possessed "new" evidence that the authorities didn't know about.

In May 1965 he bought his own set of the Warren Report volumes, and became further engrossed. He ignored his graduate studies and could not concentrate on work. Finally, he took a leave of absence from North American, formally ending his association with the company about a year later.

In the fall of 1965 he heard that Wesley Liebeler, an attorney who had been on the Warren Commission staff, was on the UCLA campus. His association with Liebeler

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ultimately led him to the theory that the body of the President had been surgically altered. In June 1966, he wrote a 30,000-word article for Ramparts magazine, on the medical evidence.

He found his time was now totally focused on his investigation. By October 1966, because he was unable to make up the incomplete graduate courses he had ignored, he was dismissed from UCLA.

With school and work out of the picture, Lifton decided to take six months' for further research to expand on his findings. He would live for the six months he thought the project would take on \$6,000 he had saved. "If anyone had told me then that I would spend fifteen years of my life studying the events of that fatal weekend in Dallas," he says now, "I would have thought that insane."

From late 1967 until December 1978, when he signed a contract with Macmillan to publish BEST EVIDENCE: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy, Lifton managed to live on the \$2,000 to \$3,000 per year he earned as a lecturer and film consultant, supplemented by family support. He estimates he could have been earning approximately \$20,000 per year as an engineer. "It always looked like the end was just around the corner," he commented, "and I knew my life would be seriously incomplete if this book was not published."

During the course of his long investigation, Lifton had to develop a working knowledge of new disciplines: still and motion picture photography, autopsy procedure, fingerprinting. He also learned how the government stores and files information and how to obtain it, and "all about the FBI."

The telephone has been a major tool in his investigation. He has spent as much as \$800 per month in long distance phone calls over a decade.

"I wrote BEST EVIDENCE because I wanted everyone else to have the same experience I had in discovering new evidence about the assassination," he says. "Perhaps it will inspire other people who have information--of which they may not even know the meaning, or how it fits into the case--to come forward. Perhaps together, we can push the investigation further."

"In any case, I intend to keep monitoring any new information that develops. My interest is the truth."